

SPUR CROSS RANCH CONSERVATION AREA MASTER PLAN

***Stakeholder Meeting Summary Notes
Thursday, January 23, 2003***

Attendees/Affiliation

Lee Anderson, *Spur Cross Stables*
Rhonda Anderson, *Spur Cross Stables*
Jean Anderson, *ASHA*
Lu Cartharius, *Town of Cave Creek*
Gail Clement, *G. M. Clement & Associates*
Jim Crook, *ASHA*
Mark Hackbarth, *DFCAAS*
Thom Hulen, *Desert Foothills Land Trust*
Evelyn Johnson, *Cave Creek Museum*
Dick Lorange, *Coalition of AZ Bicyclists*
Angie McIntire, *AZ Game & Fish*
Grace Meeth, *Town of Cave Creek*
Ralph Mozilo, *Town of Cave Creek*

Lillian Moodey, *ASLD*
Ken Mouw, *Maricopa County Parks & Recreation*
Rick Peacock, *Wild West Jeep Tours*
Brenda Poulos, *AAS*
Art Randall, *Wild West Jeep Tours*
Jay Ream, *Arizona State Parks*
Curtis Riggs, *Sonoran News*
George Ross, *Red Dog Homeowners Association*
Karl Siderits, *Tonto National Forest*
Terry Smith, *Town of Cave Creek*
Don Sorchych, *Sonoran News*
Shea Stanfield, *Town Council*
Jo Ann Stuckey, *Cave Creek Museum*

Consultant Team

Michael Park, URS
Richard Knox, URS
Peggy Fiandaca, Partners for Strategic Action, Inc.

Introduction

Michael Park with URS welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance. He gave an overview of the project and progress completed to date. The purpose of the second stakeholder meeting is to receive input about the work completed to date on the Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area (SCRCA) Master Plan. The purpose of the master plan is to evaluate how to maintain, protect and preserve the resources of the SCRCA while allowing appropriate use.

Mike explained two key concepts and presented three alternatives. The two concepts are “Management Zones” and “Opportunity Classes.”

A “**Management Zone**” is defined as an approximate land area, which allows for specific opportunity classes to occur within its boundaries.

“**Opportunity Classes**” provide a qualitative description of the kinds of resources (e.g., cultural, biological, hydrologic, etc.) and social conditions (e.g., hiking, equestrian, biking, other day use) to occur within a management zone. SCRCA

managers will utilize adaptive management protocols to achieve desired conditions in SCRCA.

Based on the “Management Zones” and “Opportunity Classes”, three draft alternatives have been developed for SCRCA. The difference between Alternative #1 and Alternative #2 is the alignment of the regional trail. Alternative #3 can be Alternatives #1 or #2 with the combining of one of the management zones to create the “Primitive Desert Uplands.”

Public Involvement

Following the presentation, Mike took questions from the stakeholders in attendance. Following is a summary of the questions/answers and comments.

Question: Where does the regional trail come into the area? What land does it cross?

Response: The regional trail enters SCRCA in the southwest corner of the site and traverses a variety of land including disturbed and undisturbed upper Sonoran Desert biomes and Sonoran Desert riparian biomes. Approximately 2/3rds of the proposed location of the trail utilizes existing trails.

Question: Are motorized vehicles allowed on the trail?

Response: Motorized vehicles are not allowed on SCRCA with the exception of administrative and emergency vehicles.

Question: Are you proposing future trails in the backcountry area? What about existing equestrian trails?

Response:

- ✓ No new trails in the backcountry area.
- ✓ Alternative 1: Trail up the backside of Elephant Butte. There has been some talk about developing that trail.

Question: Will there be any staging areas?

Response:

- ✓ In the blue area on the alternatives or next to this area will be.
- ✓ Defining the specifics will occur in the next stage of the study.

Question: Are equestrian uses precluded in the area adjacent to the creek?

Response: Equestrian uses will continue on the road – in the blue area and where it crosses the creek.

Question: The trail that goes south of Spur Cross Ranch is it on State lands?

Response:

- ✓ Need to keep that open because it creates a loop trail.
- ✓ It is a historic trail.
- ✓ Due to the fact that the area is owned by the State and Maricopa County there is an opportunity for joint planning in that area. That is why we planned a trail on SCRCA.

Question: Did you use the guidelines in the IGA and easements?

Response: Yes.

Question: Who is the individual at the Arizona State Land Department (ASLD) to coordinate with regarding the southwest gate? The consulting team should be coordinating with that person.

Response:

- ✓ We have made initial contact with ASLD. We will look further into these issues.
- ✓ We will encourage that Reed Kempton, MC Regional Trails and ASLD coordinate.

Question: What is the difference between the IGA and the guidelines?

Response: Vice-Mayor explained.

Question: Permitting? How are we going to permit users?

Response:

- ✓ We will be studying different ways for permitting. There are a lot of ways to do permitting. Some examples include:
 - Some type of user tracking system which may include web based permit access, registries, underground user counters, etc.
 - Spur Cross Trail Opportunity Class – no permits are envisioned at this time along the SC Trail OC if use is contained within the specified area.
 - That does not mean there would not be a fee.

Question: What is the criteria to determine if a permit will be given or not?

Response:

- ✓ The “Limits of Acceptable Change” (LAC) is the system that will be used to monitor degradation of the resource. Criteria may include; increases in barren ground, increases in user conflicts, increases in noise levels, increases in litter, defacement of cultural properties, use numbers exceeded, increases in wildcat trails, fires, or erosion/sedimentation to name but a few.

Question: So, the number and types of uses determine the impact on the resources – that’s the system?

Response: We are interested in a number of variables including: resource sensitivity (i.e., Elephant Butte fortress site), frequency of use (i.e., times per day, week, month, year), duration of use (long term or short term), numbers of use, season and time of use (i.e., warm vs. cool season week day vs. weekend use); types of use, location of use, time of day. Once we have a full understanding of the current types of use, we can model these variables within a GIS framework to determine where conflicts may occur. Over time as more accurate data is collected on site this model will be refined to account for increases (or decreases) in use.

Question: What’s the degradation of hiking or riding a horse on a trail? I do not believe a trail would degrade the resource. What uses would degrade the park? So why does it matter the number of people that go down the trail? I believe the impact would be limited.

Response: This opinion may assume that all people are good outdoorsmen. For example, they do not leave the trail, do not litter, etc. Empirical data exists that suggests two primary types of sources affect the natural environment: 1) rain, wind, fire, earthquakes etc. and 2) human use. Studies also have shown that trails and roads can lead to resource degradation associated with soil compaction, habitat fragmentation, increases in soil erosion, vegetation trampling etc. Secondary impacts could include increases in human caused fires, increases in litter and human waste, etc.

Question: I am concerned that whoever is in charge of overseeing SCRCA they could put arbitrary limitations on the use of the area.

Response: The County as the conservation area manager will oversee the implementation and long term monitoring efforts associated with resource conservation. If use data suggests that resources are being affected appropriate adaptive management strategies will be implemented. The master plan will be designed to use a type of decision matrix to allow change to occur. The hope is that through docents, stewardships, teaming, and friends groups limitations of use will be infrequent. However, safe guards will be developed to insure that resource degradation will not occur.

Question: The current trails provide access to areas (i.e., major arterial trails). These access areas that should be set aside or maintained. When you stay on a trail, you should be given unlimited access. Is this going to happen?

Response: Unlimited access will not occur. Maricopa County Regional Trail system is intended to provide regional trail access.

Question: The regional trail does not go where we are talking about. It is important to maintain the western access to the Tonto. I do not want these areas shut down. We need to recognize major trails such as the Spur Cross Trail, the trail to north, as well as the Maricopa County Regional Trail.

Response: There has to be a point when the LAC is met and actions must be taken to conserve the resource.

Question: The presentation about permits is too complex. Consider an easier system such as posting a sign in area where people sign in and state where they are going instead of instituting a permit system. It might be abused but I disagree with mass punishment for the few that break the rules. When someone is caught, punish him or her. I am concerned about the permit system. I do not think we can establish today what might happen to the resource long-term.

Response: There are many different ways to address monitoring access. Some examples:

- ✓ Post access areas when they are off-limits.
- ✓ One option is that when you get to the gate, you log in and out.

Question: I am concerned about the access for handicapped. I do not see where you are providing handicapped access to SCRCA. I do not want to see jeeps to handle this population because this is very rugged area. How is this access going to be provided?

Response:

- ✓ We are required by law to ensure some access to the resource by handicapped and/or elderly.

- ✓ For elderly people, we need to provide some facility (e.g., golf cart, and tram). Additionally there needs to be attention provided for children to have access.

Question: How much development would have to occur to accommodate handicapped/elderly?

Response:

- ✓ Could do an overlook type of viewing areas that provide access for elderly and/or handicapped to experience the site.
- ✓ Access would be limited strictly to the blue designated on the map.

Remarks:

- ✓ Cave Creek has had a very bad experience with the management of Cave Creek Park. This is why there is so much concern about how the SCRCA will be managed over time.
- ✓ The Cave Creek citizens believe that SCRCA is “our” conservation area. We are the stewards of the area. We have to be able to live with it long-term.
- ✓ People change as time goes on. We do not want someone to come in to arbitrarily shut down trails.
- ✓ No objection to requiring maintenance of trails when they are impacted by use.
- ✓ As horse people, we use SCR to pass through to forest.

Question: The LAC is going to be very specific, right?

Response: Yes.

Question: Will the westside area have open access?

Response: The permit system is not to control access but to monitor impact to the resource.

Question: Who makes the decision regarding the impact to resources? What will be the provisions for public input when making the determination?

Response: When SCRCA is approaching a “limit”, there will be “protocols” that must be followed before decisions are made. However, the protocols have not been developed.

Question: We are making an assumption that the larger the numbers of people using SCRCA will result in “damage”. It could take “one bad apple” to cause damage.

Therefore, we need to get to or police for the bad apple and not punish everyone. Will that be taken into consideration? If so, how?

Response:

- ✓ Permitting system will cut down on the spontaneous user.

Question: I am concerned that someone off-premise will make decisions about SCRCA.

If you create a system too difficult, they will trespass or make their own trails. The strength of this area (i.e., Cave Creek) is the people. How do we incorporate the “people” into the system?

Response:

- ✓ It is important to engage the public in “policing” the area. That’s the strong message that the public needs to hear. The people that use the area must be reporting things, etc.
- ✓ That’s the strength of public lands, as well as encouraging “responsible public use”. When the “limits” are being reached, then working with the people is the solution.

Question: If a trail is maintained, why do you need the numbers? Numbers won’t impact the resource if they are on maintained trails.

- ✓ Response: Use numbers will show patterns developing over time that will assist with on the ground management decisions.

Remark: People don’t mind paying, but they do mind being limited.

Question: Things should be phased. If you require a permit in Cave Creek when we have already taxed ourselves for the area, you will get people upset. People don’t mind signing in and out. But limiting by a permit is another issue.

Response:

- ✓ Don’t have a definition of what a permit program might look like.
- ✓ We could use a “counting system”. The purpose of the monitoring is to:
 - Understand the amount of use, type of use, and where the use is.

Remark: Trailhead registration is okay. Sign in and out, and pay would probably be okay.

Question: It is my understanding that we need to develop a coordinated system in order to monitor the impact of the resource, so a decision can be made?

Response: Yes

- ✓ Monitor archaeological impact.
- ✓ Degradation of cultural sites.
- ✓ There needs to be a system to monitor the entire property (i.e., A system to monitor the entire SCRCA and not just trails).
- ✓ Completing Field Reconnaissance Forms, for example will assist in monitoring the impact over time.

Question: In the interim or long-term plan, will there be money to maintain trails and other parts of SCRCA?

Response: As part of plan, there will be the development of a five-year capital improvement plan (CIP) to include maintenance, etc. (i.e., phased plan and budget).

Question: Where’s the parking located on the alternatives?

Response: Parking would be allowed at the entry station.

Question: For fire protection, what happens over time? What do you do in the event of a fire on adjacent lands and its impact on SCRCA?

Response: The plan is to maintain existing trails for emergency use (i.e., SCR-maintained administrative vehicles, etc.).

Question: What is the strategy for protecting archaeology? If access is provided to SCRCA there must be education in order for users to understand the implications of degradation. Have you completed the preliminary screening?

Response: No. That will occur in the next part of the study.

Question: How will the adjacent lands be managed? Public/private lands must be incorporated as part of the land management scheme. Is there good coordination and communication with these players?

Response: We have coordinated with adjacent landowners to the extent that their input is considered within the overall process. Land management decision related to adjacent land will not be dictated or suggested within the master plan. We would recommend that SCRCA land managers enter into IGAs or MOUs with adjacent landowners to insure long term coordination occurs associated with land management decisions.

Question: A representative from ASLD, felt it was important to ensure that the right person from ASLD be involved, particularly regarding the southeast corner of SCRCA. It probably would be someone from the Right of Way Section of the department.

Question: What about private landowners? Do they still have access on SCR?

Response: There is only one that is permitted legal access at this point. There are no deeded easements to landowners in the canyon.

Question: Do you see it your responsibility (i.e., URS) to contact ASLD? Is it Maricopa County's responsibility? I do not want to let this issue dropped.

Response: If JPC thinks we should, we will. We will make contact with the Maricopa County Trail person to ensure they contact ASLD.

Remark: The planning completed to date seems to see "SCRCA" as unto itself. There needs to be planning as part of entire system.

Next Steps

Mike thanked everyone for his or her time and input. He encouraged everyone to sign up on sheets in the lobby regarding partnering efforts on various aspects of the planning and implementation of the SCRCA. He mentioned that it will take a lot of individuals and entities working together to create an effective implementation program to protect the resource. He also encouraged everyone to complete the Stakeholder Questionnaire and return it by February 15, 2003.

The next SCRCA public meeting is scheduled for

Community Workshop
Thursday, January 31, 2003

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:00 p.m.